

Hunting for Caddyshack Swimming Pools

Shôn Ellerton, March 9, 2021

I miss those days of the casual swimming pool just to splash around and dive in.



There's nothing better, on a hot sweltering day, to stand at the edge of an outdoor swimming pool, blue and azure, with shimmering strands of sunlight reflecting off the smooth tiles, inviting you to submerge yourself into its cool depths. For me, it's often not the intention of getting exercise by swimming, but just to flounder around in it. To be honest, I am not a particularly good swimmer and find the ritual of going back and forth along predefined swimming lanes more of an ordeal than a pleasure. I simply want the freedom of swimming any direction I please, perhaps diving below and skirting the bottom of the pool to test how long I can hold my breath only to miraculously appear on the other side to the surprise of my young son who I managed to evade who has been trying to tag me in the water.

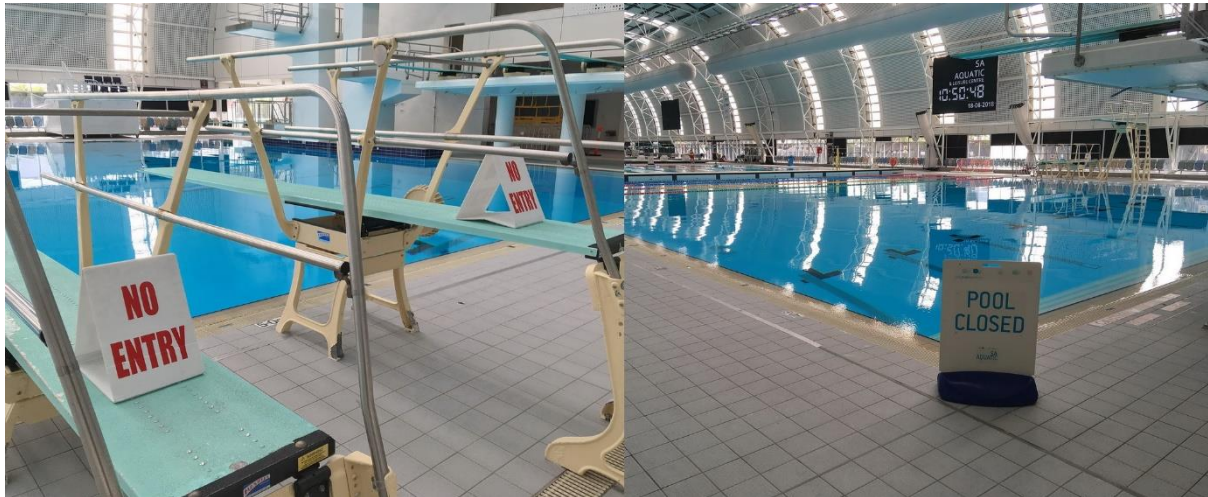
From an early age, I remember the countless occasions on visiting one of many municipal swimming pools in Colorado Springs. Some were indoors. Some were outdoors. Some were half and half. Most had diving boards, some had the really scary high-dive boards. The rules were simple. No excessive horseplay, keep your shorts on and don't piss in the pool. Anybody was allowed to use the diving boards. And, excepting the times allocated for lane swimmers, the lane strips were retracted, and the pool became an open stretch of water for everyone to simply splash about and have fun. On one side of the pool, it was shallow. On the other side, it was deep. Nice and deep. Dark blue and cool. These were your ordinary public municipal pools found to be nearly everywhere in largish towns or communities in the mid-West.

Most smaller communities in warm climates had or sometimes still have, what I call your typical ‘Caddyshack’ swimming pool, named after the classic zany comedy movie, centred around an exclusive golfing country club. The infamous pool scene when the caddies caused all sorts of havoc in the pool which finally ended up with a Baby Ruth chocolate bar being tossed into the water floating like a turd prompting everyone to panic and scream and get out of the pool. The climax of the scene occurred when the grounds keeper played by Bill Murray, started to munch on the offending Baby Ruth bar with relish whilst standing on the bottom of the cleaned and drained pool causing the wife of the club’s owner to faint with horror. These kind of swimming pools were commonplace in practically every community, hotel and leisure complex. They had a low diving board. They had shallow and deep ends. They never had permanent swimming lanes. They were often unsupervised; however, I can always remember them being gated to prevent small children in getting in. One could casually sit on the side of a pool even with a drink in the hand. You could take a little inflatable with you or even practice your snorkelling skills.

Now this was back in the 80s, a long time ago during an era when riding in the back of a pickup was not uncommon and wearing seatbelts in the back was an option. It was an era when common sense was king. For example, my mother told me to wear my seatbelts, but it was not mandated. With the United States, Australia and the United Kingdom being possibly the most litigious societies on the planet, health and safety mandates have made it nearly impossible to partake in any activity which attracts any risk without being swamped by bureaucracy and wowsers. Wowsers are those who take the seemingly virtuous stance of stemming any activity which could be perceived as remotely dangerous by telling you that you shouldn’t be doing it at all.

Now living in Australia, a climate perfectly adapted for an enticing outdoor recreational pool, particularly a nice deep one complete with diving boards, I have not come across any at all. Those that I have seen are permanently divided by swimming lanes for die-hard exercise swimmers. Those large swimming pools with five-metre deep ends and high diving platforms are usually closed off only to be used for official training sessions. My local swimming pool, the SA Aquatic Centre in Marion, Adelaide, has a beautiful swimming pool complete with 5m deep diving pool and a massive 3m deep Olympic pool; however, no one is allowed to use the diving pool unless you are ‘qualified’ and only during certain times and the 3m pool is permanently laned off for

swimmers. Even the smaller 1.8m pool was reserved and permanently laned off for rehabilitation leaving the very shallow, overly warm, kids' pool the *only* pool one can splash around in and that's only if you had a child with you, of course. Basically, there are no adults' pools which may be deemed as being purely recreational anymore.



Let it be clear, I have no problem with lane swimming and there are many pool users who simply want to do that. Swim and up and down the pool lanes for exercise and improving their swimming techniques. I certainly remember pool lanes back in the 80s; however, they were put out during scheduled times along with other activities; for example, water polo, scuba diving training, and general recreational use. Unfortunately, general recreational use, or just going to have a casual dip, has ceased to exist in our larger pools in general and it is often, sadly, because of health and safety concerns. I have not come across a deep adults' pool which you can just casually enter and swim any direction you like, tread some water, or even sit on a small inflatable. I took my young son into the corner of a 3m pool in Adelaide for him to practice treading water, an activity one cannot do in the kids' pool, but got told off by the staff that it was for lane swimmers only. The 1.8m deep pool was suitable but that too was reserved for rehab swimmers and other activities like water aerobics. There was no place in the whole complex that I could take my son into a patch of water deeper than his height to practice the life-saving art of treading water.

Sadly, the fear of liability due to health and safety has killed off our 'Caddyshack' pools. The diving boards have been removed. Many establishments have not bothered to fill their pools anymore deeming it too expensive to insure. If someone drowns in your pool, even if fenced off, you will need a damned good lawyer. Those which are supervised have draconian

safety rules and guarded by militant lifeguards frowning on any activity other than that of swimming quietly. Gone are the days in which you had the ‘fun’ casual timeslots in which swimming lanes are removed and you can do what you like provided you are not acting dangerously or using the pool as a toilet. Gone are the days you can wander into the deep end and getting your kids to practice diving for treasure. Gone are the days you can, with fear and trepidation, climb the high dive board, much like a Mr Bean episode, and try jumping off without doing a belly flop. I’ve done it as a kid and remember what it’s like. But no longer. Someone wanting to experience what it is like to dive from a height without going through the formalised training or hunting for that elusive restrictive timeslot in a diving pool, can, at least around Adelaide, pop down the coast and jump off a high rock into the sea; a far more dangerous activity. But no one’s going to sue the ass out of you if you do yourself a mischief there of course!

Apart from a very few public municipal swimming pools; for example, the Mirabella Pool in Boston (photographed in header), the last bastion of the awesome swimming pool in the litigious Western world is that of the hotel, private country club or home, if you can afford it. For example, some of the hotels in Las Vegas sport amazing organically-shaped pools complete with waterfalls, induced currents, and perpetual rafting circuits. I’ve submersed myself in great hotel swimming pools in Darwin, Australia in which one could casually drink a cool bottle of beer whilst watching the sheet lightning and bats overhead on a warm and muggy night, for example. But they are rapidly disappearing due to concerns of health and safety, or rather being legally responsible for someone else’s safety, often through their stupidity and lack of common sense. As for the rest of the World, one often has the freedom of using a pool and the risk of doing so is at the judgment of the person who wishes to undertake the risk, rather than by mandate.

I lament at the demise of the fun ‘Caddyshack’ pool. To have fun at a swimming pool not being laned off for exercise swimmers only. To bring a picnic with you on the grass without being told off for bringing food near the pool area. To have a few tries on the diving board. To float on an inflatable tube on with a cool drink in hand. A place where your kids are not shouted at for jumping in from the side of the pool. What made the pool so special in those days was the casualness of it all. It worked for all. For lane swimmers, they went at a certain time of day. For team sports like water polo, they were

allocated certain times of the week. However, every day, there were at least two to three hours for casual splashing around including unhindered use of the diving boards.

Are there anymore 'Caddyshack' swimming pools around? If so, where can I find them? Perhaps I'm looking through rose-coloured glasses at halcyon days long gone but I do miss those 'Caddyshack' swimming pools.